

The Star Cinema: Waverley's art deco darling



Star Theatre, c. 1930s, National Film and Sound Archive.

The Star Theatre was the largest and most popular of Waverley's cinemas. The first cinema, on the distinctive triangular-shaped site at the intersection of Bronte Road and Brisbane and Ebley Streets, opened in 1917, but was demolished 10 years later. The second Star Theatre, which opened in 1928 and seated 2,400 patrons, was operated by Olympic Theatres.

A story from Les Hart of Bondi Junction recounts some enterprising behaviour from local children:

"There was never a lot of money among Bondi Junction families for pleasure in the 1920s. Star Pictures raised the price [of admission] to four pence. A few of us lads armed with tin-opener and snips, cut a hole in the corrugated iron wall under the tiered seats. It was only good for one night, as a lot more heads appeared inside than tickets sold outside. Next, we would pool our pennies and halfpennies, collecting enough for one person to pay in. When the lights went out and all eyes were on the screen, our mate would open a side door. In we went, scattering everywhere. Every kid in Brisbane Street guessed what was going on and joined the queue. Always a few got caught."

The Star's best story, or urban myth, concerns the night underworld figure Squizzy Taylor, accompanied by three offiders, supposedly visited the Star Theatre. Reportedly they walked through the foyer, straight into the theatre, no-one daring to challenge the group.

Two men walked down one aisle, two down the other as a hush fell over the cinema audience. The Star seating pattern allowed them to see every person's face and without a word they scanned the crowd. They then threw open the Brisbane Street fire exit and left without saying a word.

Hoyts acquired the cinema in 1935 and remodelled it in the latest art deco style, it opening in 1938. Architects Charles Bohringer and Associates re-decorated it with a wide fan-shaped auditorium with a large steep dress circle over which there was a ceiling beamed in large coffers. Reportedly the acute angled intersection site proved a challenge to the interior designers.

The Bondi Daily, 18 March, 1939 reported:

"It is just a year today since the remodelled and luxuriously furnished Hoyts Star Theatre, Cowper Street [now Bronte Road], Bondi Junction reopened with that outstanding entertainment service which has made it a feature of life in the district."



An electric fridge was still a novelty in 1939, so this first prize was a draw card in the competition run by the Star Theatre. Hood collection, State Library of New South Wales.

In 1954 the Star was equipped with a new CinemaScope screen, the latest in cinema technology. In 1973 it was briefly renamed the Hoyts Horror House, but by the following year it had returned to its original name.

It was sold by Hoyts in 1977 for conversion to a squash centre. It reopened the following year as the Star Rock Concert and was showing movies again. But this was short-lived. It closed permanently later in 1978 and was demolished in 1981, having been at its height one of the biggest suburban cinemas in NSW and the last remaining of the four Hoyts theatres at Waverley.

Published by Waverley Library from sources in the Local History Collection, 2008.